

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

26 January 1986

# OSU prof linked to CIA work Mind control pursued in '60s

By Patrick E. Cole

Beacon Journal staff writer

To his friends and colleagues, George Alexander Kelly was a scholar and a gentleman.

He is considered among Ohio State University's top six psychology scholars in this century, and his personality theories earned him a place in the psychologists' international hall of fame, along



with such legends as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and David Hume.

His thinking and work are a landmark. Today, his papers are housed in archives named for him at the University of Nebraska.

Kelly

Those who knew him generously season their comments with glowing adjectives, calling him: honest, ethical, brilliant, patriotic, insightful, Renaissance man.

But there is one trivia item many did not know: The proposal for Kelly's 1960-61 sabbatical research project sponsored by the now-defunct Human Ecology Fund ended up in the CIA's records that document Ohio State's participation in the agency's decade-long search for ways to control the human mind.

This discovery and others, made by the Beacon Journal through the federal Freedom of Information Act, links an Ohio State faculty member for the first time to one of the CIA's most bizarre and controversial bits of once-secret research.

In addition, the circumstances provide a view of the CIA's secret dealings with the academic community, a volatile issue on campuses during the student unrest of the 1960s and an issue that has re-emerged as a source of concern among many in the academic community today.

Earlier this month, Nadav Safran, a Harvard government professor, resigned as director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies for failing to disclose that the CIA sponsored a conference the center organized on Islam and politics. That sponsorship drew attention in Europe, Asia and the Middle East as well as America.

And last week, the CIA told the New York Times it had re-established ties with universities and is receiving data from an increasing number of professors.

The project done at Ohio State 25 years ago was part of a program code-named MKULTRA — pronounced M.K. Ultra. It was the CIA's main research program into the development of chemical and biological agents from 1953 to the mid-1960s. Approved by former CIA Director Allen Dulles, the project searched for ways to develop chemical and biological agents to be used in "clandestine operations to control human behavior," according to Congressional documents.

In August 1977, when CIA Director Stansfield Turner released a ream of documents on MKULTRA to Congress, the program triggered worldwide outrage.

That same month, Ohio State officials announced it was one of 80 U.S. institutions involved, although the CIA would not identify the researchers.

But before the public learned about MKULTRA, it was a well-kept secret even within the CIA — so sensitive it wasn't mentioned in a secret 1968 CIA study of the agency's relationship with the academic community.

The extent of the research remains unknown since a CIA official ordered most MKULTRA records destroyed in January 1973. Yet some research — including ones done by Ohio State professors — had been saved.

Many universities do not view CIA-funded scholarly research as taboo, but in almost all cases they require funding by intelligence sources to be disclosed to the university. It isn't clear whether anyone at Ohio State knew Kelly received a CIA grant.

## The research projects

MKULTRA was an umbrella under which 149 known subpro-

jects were conducted at universities, medical facilities and penal institutions. The CIA's Information and Privacy Division said two of those projects, numbered 96 and 101, were conducted at Ohio State.

The most information was released on subproject 96. Called *A Study of the Current Decision Matrices of (deleted) Scholars*, it was proposed by an Ohio State psychology professor July 18, 1959.

The project records, consisting of 30 pages of correspondence, a proposal, receipts and invoices, provide a classic illustration of how the CIA secretly arranged to have scholars do research.

The proposal said the project's purpose was to search for a new theory to explain how people reach decisions:

"Traditionally psychologists have approached the problem of understanding human behavior by attempting to seek out the motives or forces which seem to impel persons willy-nilly along particular lines of action. . . . But there is another approach," the proposal said.

As an alternative, the researcher proposed using a new theory called psychology of personal constructs — patterns perceived by individuals that are used to explain the realities encountered in life.

The researcher sought to discover how a college professor could be inclined to change his personal constructs and hence his position on an issue. The researcher assumed any person can be forced to change his position, so "it becomes important to find out what alternatives are available to him when he must make new choices."

"The firmness of his stand may be reassuring, providing he is never dislodged from it," the proposal said. "But the question is, what direction will he jump if he can no longer stand where he is standing?"

According to the records, the professor's wife accompanied him and helped collect data.

According to a CIA memo dated July 22, 1959, the project had two main goals: 1) to apply the

2

psychology of personal constructs to foreign cultures, and 2) to obtain data about research attitudes and personality information on other scholars through the researcher's access to them.

CIA accounting records show the agency paid the professor \$37,428 — about \$3,000 more than the original proposal. Besides paying the professor's salary while he was on leave, it covered secretarial help, research equipment, gifts and travel.

Little is known about the second proposal, subproject 101. A CIA memo dated Sept. 23, 1959, estimated consulting would cost \$2,000 to pay an Ohio State professor to research the biophysics of the central nervous system. But CIA records show only \$100 of that money was used.

### Kelly and subproject 96

The CIA will not say which professors did research for the two MKULTRA projects. And the Freedom of Information Act and federal court decisions allow the agency to withhold the names.

However, the Beacon Journal conducted a four-week investigation of key facts about subproject 96's researcher — apparently left inadvertently in the project's records and CIA correspondence. After examining those clues and the backgrounds of the 1959-1960 Ohio State psychology faculty, Kelly's background appeared to best fit those clues.

Kelly, who died in 1967, taught psychology at Ohio State from 1946-1965. He is known to his field as the father of the psychology of personal constructs — the subject of the CIA-funded research project. Former Ohio State psychology faculty members say there was no other scholar at Ohio State as prominent as Kelly in this field.

"That would be right up George's alley," said Donald Meyer, professor emeritus of psychology at Ohio State.

"That had to be Kelly — it had to be — because personal constructs was his baby, without question," said another Ohio State professor who asked not to be identified.

Other clues link Kelly to subproject 96. One document said the researcher formerly held the

presidency of a major organization or association, but deleted the name. Kelly served as president of the American Psychological Association's clinical division from 1956-57 and was president of the consulting division of that organization in 1954-55.

A CIA memo noted the researcher had written a major work on the psychology of personal constructs shortly before he had submitted the proposal for subproject 96 to the CIA in 1959. In 1955, Kelly published his most significant work, *A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs*.

Another key clue was the name deleted from the documents: The researcher's last name, as Kelly's, was five letters long.

### Kelly's sabbatical

The project's itinerary and source of funding reflected a nearly identical link with Kelly's research activities.

The 12-month project was to begin April 1, 1960, and documents said the researcher could arrange for a sabbatical.

According to the records, the researcher had to make specific visits to various cities (deleted) during 1960 and 1961 to carry out the project.

Biographical information on file at Ohio State about Kelly shows he left Ohio State during the same time period, taking leave in the spring of 1960 until March 1961 to "lecture on personality theory in various countries."

Most importantly, Ohio State records show Kelly's sponsor for his sabbatical was the Human Ecology Fund. In 1977, the CIA revealed that fund (also known as the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology) was a CIA operation set up to secretly fund psychological research.

According to its own reports, the fund, established in May 1955 and disbanded 10 years later, was a non-profit corporation based in Forest Hills, N. Y., encouraging research into "marked behavioral change and the conditions under which it occurs."

One annual report also said the fund sponsored studies of how people reacted to LSD at the Butler Health Center in Providence,

R.I., a known MKULTRA research project.

The subproject 96 proposal said the research should contribute to psychological knowledge and to the "understanding of ecological factors in mankind's decisions" — this was one of the principal aims of the Human Ecology Fund, the annual report said.

And in 1962, a year after the CIA-funded study on decision matrices of scholars was to have been completed, Kelly published a paper, *Europe's Matrix of Decision Making*, in which Kelly said his remarks were based on research into the psychology of personal constructs sponsored by the Human Ecology Fund.

### Did Kelly know of CIA?

If Kelly was the researcher — and the documents and his background suggest he was — he could have known his research would be used by the CIA.

Most researchers apparently did not know the Human Ecology Fund was created by the CIA. According to John Gittinger, a former CIA employee who testified before Congress in 1977, most researchers did not know they were getting CIA money through the fund. Although the agency provided funding for projects in which they had an interest, they did not direct the research, he said.

The correspondence on subproject 96 confirms this theory. The researcher never referred to CIA or MKULTRA when he submitted the proposal. Neither did letters responding to the researcher nor did other letters.

In fact, the researcher's July 18, 1959, proposal letter released by the CIA was addressed to "Executive Secretary" — the address and the organization's name were deleted. The fund's annual report instructed those interested in receiving information about grants to send a letter to "Executive Secretary, Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology" in Forest Hills, New York.

But a CIA memo offers strong evidence the researcher knew his data was going to the CIA:

• A July 22, 1959, CIA memo on subproject 96 said the re-

Continued

3

searcher had been "a fully cleared consultant to the Agency for four years and has demonstrated unusual sensitivity and perceptivity to Agency needs," especially in assessment matters.

• Page 2 of the memo said it learned the researcher was planning a study on decision matrices because of his relationship as a consultant. "However, at our request, he agreed to submit this original request to (blank)" — a 40-letter deletion that could have been an organization's name such as the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology.

• The memorandum also said the agency granted the researcher access to top-secret material.

An Ohio State psychology professor who knew Kelly well said Kelly probably knew a great deal about the fund's CIA ties.

"My understanding was that he (Kelly) was one of the founders of the organization," said the professor, who asked not to be named. "I honestly don't know if he was getting funds from the CIA, but he knew his way well around Washington.

"Many of these people were duped, and as I understand it, there were prominent people associated with the Human Ecology Fund.

"There were many organizations the CIA funded, but the people did not know they were involved," he said.

"The thing had a good sound to it, the society (for the investigation of human ecology) sounded like it was trying to do good work," the professor said. "And the people connected with it were shocked to learn it was funded by the CIA."

There is no evidence Kelly's research involved mind control or behavior modification. But the documents do not say how the CIA used the study about how scholars make decisions.

### A 'straightforward man'

Gladys Kelly, the scholar's widow, declined to comment on her husband's past research.

Mrs. Kelly went with him during his sabbatical and the CIA apparently cleared the researcher's wife to help.

"I don't want to have anything to do with this," Mrs Kelly said

when contacted by phone at her Silver Spring, Md., apartment. "My husband is dead."

But many of Kelly's former colleagues were willing to talk. One of them who knew him well was Brendan Maher, a Harvard psychology professor who studied under Kelly during the 1950s.

Maher edited a book about Kelly published in 1969: *Clinical Psychology and Personality: The Selected Papers of George Kelly*.

Maher said he did not think a CIA connection was consistent with Kelly's character.

"He was the most straightforward man I have ever met," he said in an interview at Harvard. "He was a man of considerable integrity. He was very honest, straightforward. He told you exactly what he thought.

"He was opposed to all forms of behavior modification," Maher said. "I cannot conceive what could come out of it would be secret or how it would be useful to the CIA."

Maher admitted, however, that one paragraph in the CIA-funded project that described its focus "is consistent with many things that appear in his books."

"I'm a little surprised," said Appel of the University of Texas at Austin. "He was a very free and autonomous person, one who is not likely to be involved with the establishment."

A.W. Landfield, professor of psychology at the University of Nebraska who studied under Kelly, said he didn't know of his former professor ever engaging in classified research and noting the library there that houses archives for Kelly's books and papers.

"There is nothing here that would have any bearing on that.

"He was a fine scholar, and he was a bit formal," Landfield said. "He had a lot of wit and humor in his writings. And I always thought he was a man of good character. He was highly talented. He was kind of like a Renaissance man."

### Ohio State reaction

Novice Fawcett, Ohio State's president from 1956 to 1972, said he couldn't recall any research being done for the CIA. "Offhand, I cannot remember research activities involving faculty mem-

bers and the CIA," he said. "And I have no personal records of this at all."

"We don't have any control if he is doing something over the summer on his own time," said Thomas Sweeney, Ohio State's associate vice president for research. "But if the university is a party to the contract, the institution would have no way of knowing about it."

"We have elaborate procedures in which if any humans are subjects of research, those projects must be approved by a committee," Sweeney said, adding disclosure policy then would have been the same as it is now for faculty members wishing to do research with an intelligence organization.

Ohio State officials said they are not aware of any CIA-funded research currently being conducted at the university.